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A New Deal for Israel

After a two-year chill, the U.S. warms up to an old friend

"Regagan gave away the store and got nothing in return," said a White House critic of the Administration's Middle East policies. At a State Department dinner for Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, a few guests even joked about raising the Star of David flag over the White House to signal the "Israeli victory."

The verbal barbs were aimed at a new "strategic cooperation" agreement between the U.S. and Israel worked out during a three-day visit to Washington by Shamir and his top aides. Although the details need to be ironed out in future meetings between lesser officials of both nations, the package of military aid and trade concessions places Israel back in the forefront of U.S. policy in the Middle East, at the calculated risk of upsetting the moderate Arab states. As such, it was an abrupt shift in the Administration's Middle East policy, which had stressed U.S. efforts to play an evenhanded mediator's role.

The improvement in U.S.-Israeli relations was engineered largely by Secretary of State George Shultz, who has felt personally betrayed by the refusal of Syrian President Hafez Assad to carry out a promise to withdraw troops from Lebanon after Israel not only agreed to do so but unilaterally and prematurely drew back to safer positions in southern Lebanon, actually against U.S. wishes. The agreement is virtually a return to former Secretary of State Alexander Haig's "consensus of strategic concerns," in which U.S. and Israeli military cooperation was seen as vital to discouraging Soviet intrusion into Middle East politics and, more broadly, to keep Western oil supplies flowing from the Persian Gulf. Explained one U.S. diplomat: "The U.S. can have a Middle East policy with Israel or one without Israel. For the past 15 months we've had one without Israel. Now we're going back to one with Israel."

In a second burst of Middle East diplomacy just 22 hours later last week, President Reagan met with Lebanon's embattled President Amin Gemayel, and heard the closer U.S.-Israel ties criticized in a personal meeting with Prince Bandar ibn Sultan, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to

the U.S. Although mostly planned in advance, the week's activity had an air of urgency. Repeatedly frustrated in its efforts to solve the Lebanon crisis and the Palestinian dilemma, and with U.S. Marines still exposed to terrorism, shelling and sniper fire at the Beirut airport, the Administration felt it was time to shake up the ingredients in the Middle East mix.

ment. More ominously, Assad was reported to be seriously ill. The White House heard reports that he had blood cancer, and suffered partial paralysis after developing a clot in his left leg. U.S. intelligence sources, however, believed that Assad was recovering and was able to take part in some governmental meetings. At any rate, he walked across a bridge in Da-

mascus last week and waved vigorously to cheering pedestrians. Any chance that Assad's control was waning could be seen as both an opportunity and a danger. On the one hand, his determination to dominate Lebanon might be softening, and weaker successors might be willing to withdraw troops; on the other, those successors might be even more radical and more difficult to cope with.

—By Ed Magnuson.

Reported by Douglas Brew and Johanna McGarry/Washington



Shamir: "We did not pay for what we got from the Americans"

A winner, from the White House to Good Morning, America.

Its thin but persistent hope was that greater tragedies could be averted and a semblance of stability restored.

Some degree of stability was sorely needed. Forces, events and even leaders in the Middle East are in a state of increasing flux. The Soviet Union has rearmed Syria, which defiantly refused to withdraw from any of the Lebanese territory from which it has supported Shi'ite and Druse factions fighting Gemayel's Christian-dominated central govern-

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